

【연구논문】

## **The Ethics of Melancholia in James Baldwin's Essays**

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Sigmund Freud's essays on femininity, coming at the end of his career, open up a theoretical field for a discussion of the lacking subject. Freud had previously maintained that the baby girl's psychological development is the reverse image of the boy's. Since the boy started off with an intense attachment to his mother, the girl supposedly began with an attachment to her father. In "Some Psychological Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction between the Sexes," however, Freud acknowledges that such a parallel is not confirmed by his observations. He reveals for the first time the baby girl's prolonged pre-Oedipal attachment to the mother. What then causes the girl to abandon her primary object of cathexis? Even more puzzling for Freud is the accompanying reversal of affect; the girl not only switches libidinal objects but also develops hostility toward her mother.

Putting James Baldwin in conversation with Freud has the interesting effect of injecting race into this discussion of the lacking subject. Baldwin is certainly not an author who has lacked psychoanalyzing attention from his critics. One of the most influential early critics to write on Baldwin, Irving Howe, framed both Baldwin and Ralph Ellison as the lesser sons of Richard Wright in his notorious 1963 article "Black

Boys and Native Sons.” Despite Ellison’s elegant reprisal, Howe’s essay set the standard for Baldwin criticism for the coming decades. Of course, this may have been due less to the persuasiveness of Howe’s essay than to the widespread assumptions about African American writing in general. However that may be, since the publication of Howe’s essay, Baldwin’s works have often been treated as material for psychoanalyzing, if not pathologizing, the author. Michel Fabre would write in 1970 that Baldwin’s writing is “not the expression of a man who fights for his ideas, but the sentimental reaction, sometimes almost pathological, of a wounded nature” (138). The recent renewal of critical interest in Baldwin, marked by Dwight McBride’s collection of essays *James Baldwin Now*, does little to alleviate the psychoanalyzing gaze. Written from the perspective of queer theory, many of these essays focus exclusively on James Baldwin’s homosexuality.

Despite the dangers of applying the tools of psychoanalysis yet again to Baldwin’s writing, this paper proposes a different approach. Rather than interpreting his essays as reflective of an individual’s troubled relationship to his father, this paper focuses on Baldwin’s analysis of the psychic dimension of race as a technique of domination. Baldwin writes about his personal experience of growing up as a black person in Harlem during the time of the Depression and the ghettoization of the African American sections in the major industrial cities of the North. Often, however, the personal is the doorway to his analysis of the larger network of systematic racism. The most insidious effects of racism, according to Baldwin, lie in what it does to the psyche. In order to utilize the heuristic tools provided by psychoanalysis for this purpose, I will be focusing less on the alleged Oedipus complex of the author and more on the concept of lack, especially as Freud conceptualized the

latter in his discussions of femininity. As I will trace in the following section, those final essays reflect a deepening of Freud's analysis of the ego and a revision of his earlier concepts such as the Oedipus complex.

Furthermore, this paper argues that an examination of Baldwin's insight into the psychic dimensions of racism facilitates the critical project of opening up psychoanalysis to the social, a project that has gained momentum in the last twenty years.<sup>1)</sup> In Freud's universalizing account, it is only the anatomical difference between the sexes that results in a lacking subject. Baldwin's examination of his relationship to his father raises the question whether in lived-life sex is the sole factor that introduces lack in the individual's psyche. As David Eng argues in *Racial Castration*, it is "indispensable to incorporate socially and historically variable factors into what hitherto has been rather ahistorical and essentializing psychoanalytic formulations of the construction of subjectivity" (5). This paper responds to that call in the sense that it reads Baldwin's account of racial subjection as a valid complication of Freud's theory.

### The Psychic Economy of Loss

In his essays on femininity Freud theorizes that the baby girl receives a wound to her narcissism when she realizes her lack of a penis. The implications of her lack result in the devaluation of her mother who

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1) This project started with feminist re-readings of Freud such as the works of Kaja Silverman, Diana Fuss, and Mary Ann Doane. Judith Butler's seminal work *The Psychic Life of Power* starts where Michel Foucault leaves off—the interface between power and the subject. Similar efforts have emerged from postcolonial studies as well—most notably in the writings of Gayatri Spivak and Ranjana Khanna. In critical race theory, the theorization of racial melancholia by David Eng and Anne Anlin Cheng is in dialogue with the above critics.

“suffers a heavy loss of credit in her eyes” (“Female Sexuality” 192). Realizing that her mother is a lacking mother, she gives up the object of her love and her phallic sexuality. The effect of this renouncement is devastating for her sexuality in general: “very often when the little girl represses her previous masculinity a considerable part of her general sexual life is permanently injured” (“Female Sexuality” 198). The little girl, alienated from her primary love object and her own self, is flung into the next stage of her development. The developmental story of the boy differs in that, at every bend, the boy child opts to preserve his narcissism. When the boy abandons his love object, which happens later than the girl, he does so in order to avoid castration: “If the gratification desired in consequence of the love [for his mother] is to cost the child his penis, a conflict must arise between the narcissistic interest in this part of the body and the libidinal cathexis of the parent-objects. Normally, in this conflict the first of these forces triumphs” (“The Passing” 169). As Freud specifies in the above passage, it is the child’s “narcissistic interest” in his penis that forces him to abandon his love object, and his successful overcoming of the Oedipus complex is indebted to his decision to preserve his narcissism at all costs. This gives rise to the suspicion that the narcissistic gender, contrary to Freud’s suggestion in “On Narcissism,” may be male rather than female.

A close reading of “On Narcissism,” in fact, reveals that men, far from overcoming narcissism, are displaced narcissists. The 1914 essay “On Narcissism” is the text in which Freud develops the crucial concept of the ego-ideal. After discarding children, primitives, women, and homosexuals as immaturely narcissistic, Freud argues that only heterosexual men are capable of “complete object-love of the anaclitic type” (69). Having said that, he cannot help but ask himself what

happens to the narcissistic ego-libido of this heterosexual man. He comes to the conclusion that the heterosexual man sets up an ego-ideal to which he aspires: "To this ideal ego is now directed the self-love which the real ego enjoyed in childhood. The narcissism seems to be now displaced on to this new ideal ego, which deems itself the possessor of all perfections. As always where the libido is concerned, here again man has shown himself incapable of giving up a gratification he has once enjoyed" (74). Freud's unrelenting analysis in the end reveals that even the heterosexual male subject refuses to completely abandon the gratification of narcissism. By positing an ego-ideal which is "the possessor of all perfections" and directing his libidinal energy to the ideal, the normal subject opts for a win-win strategy in which he retains his narcissism and at the same time idealizes a part of himself. The successful resolution of the Oedipus complex is accompanied by the installation of an ego-ideal; the resolution of the Oedipus complex is a sophisticated psychic mechanism that above everything else preserves and even abets the male child's self-love.

One has to leave the framework of narcissism altogether to understand the girl's premature loss of her primary love object. Freud's theorizing of something "beyond narcissism" appears in 1917 as a study of mourning and melancholia. In mourning, the subject, similar to the boy child's decision to preserve his narcissism, lets go of the lost object and is reconciled to its loss. Freud is startled to discover, however, that under certain circumstances the ego would not let go of the lost object. Rather, the ego holds onto the lost object and lets the shadow of death fall on the ego itself. It is the only state in which suicide becomes a possibility for that perennially self-loving ego. In other words, melancholia is a profound disruption to the subject's narcissistic

mechanism. In the process of explaining this phenomenon, Freud theorizes the concept of identification, a psychic alteration that occurs when the subject refuses to let go of the lost object: "Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, so that the latter could henceforth be criticized by a special mental faculty like an object, like the forsaken object" ("Mourning and Melancholia" 170). The girl child's turn from her mother can be better understood in the light of the concept of melancholia. Rather than abandoning the love object, she lodges her loss in her ego. Her ego is split into two in the process and she forever suffers from the wide gap that opens up between the two parts. A melancholic internal dialogue begins, which manifests externally as the lacking subject's emotional distress or a sense of inadequacy.

### Cycles of Negative Affect

The writings of James Baldwin circle around the psychic trauma of everyday racism and, perhaps because Baldwin has experienced it himself, he is much more sensitive to the painful process through which lack is entrenched in a child's psyche. Freud, for example, suggests that the girl realizes her lack in a flash when she sees a penis for the first time: "She makes her judgement and her decision in a flash. She has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it" ("Some Psychological Consequences" 177). Baldwin's account of the African American child growing up in America suggests otherwise:

Long before the Negro child perceives this [racial] difference, and even longer before he understands it, he has begun to react to it, he has begun to be controlled by it. . . . He must be "good" not only in order to

please his parents and not only to avoid being punished by them; behind their authority stands another, nameless and impersonal, infinitely harder to please, and bottomlessly cruel. And this filters into the child's consciousness through his parents' tone of voice as he is being exhorted, punished, or loved; in the sudden, uncontrollable note of fear heard in his mother's or his father's voice when he has strayed beyond some particular boundary. (*Fire* 26)

Baldwin's model can be used to critique Freud's isolation of the Oedipus triangle. Far from imagining the triangle as existing outside of social relations, Baldwin returns the triangle to its place in society. And placed within the context of the larger racist American society, the triangle of the African American family can never be free from the alien, "bottomlessly cruel" authority that constantly threatens and denigrates its existence. It is not necessary, Baldwin further tells us, for that authority to take concrete form. That will eventually happen, but long before the actual experience of looking, the child gains an understanding of his or her symbolic lack. It "filters" into his or her consciousness through the tone of fear that seizes the parents—not just the mother but also the father—when the child crosses certain boundaries. The experience of actually seeing a white person, much like the act of seeing a penis, visualizes and materializes, provides a convenient symbol for a social oppression. What happens in a flash is the matching of those two, not the realization of lack.

Baldwin also introduces the concept of a lacking father by conceptualizing lack as a social condition rather than an anatomical condition. Early in "Notes of a Native Son," Baldwin recounts a scene from his childhood where the choice between his father and the white

world seemed to stand out clearly like a *tableau vivant*. When he was nine, a kindly white teacher impressed by his talent in writing offered to take him to see “real” plays, beckoning Baldwin to cultural capital then barred to his class and race. Baldwin let his teacher come to pick him up because he knew he would not be able to persuade his father on his own. Baldwin reports, “It was clear, during the brief interview in our living room, that my father was agreeing very much against his will and that he would have refused permission if he had dared. The fact that he did not dare caused me to despise him” (68). Although he had intended to counter his father’s authority with the white teacher’s skin, the success has an unexpected psychological consequence. The lacking father became the object of the son’s contempt.

The most damaging consequence of such a turning is the reversal of affect that accompanies the de-idealization of the once loved object. Freud writes, “The turning away from the mother is accompanied by hostility; the attachment to the mother ends in hate. A hate of that kind may become very striking and last all through life; it may be carefully overcompensated later on . . . .” (“Femininity” 107). When the daughter blames the mother for her lack of a penis, the affectionate bond that existed between the mother and the daughter is sacrificed while the social logic behind her castration goes unchallenged. Locked in a self-defeating logic, the daughter relates to the world primarily through hatred. The African American subject suffers similarly when s/he internalizes lack. Like the baby girl turning away from her mother, Baldwin turns away from his father by blaming him for conditions of their life: “I had inclined to be contemptuous of my father for the conditions of his life, for the conditions of our lives” (“Notes” 63). Only when Baldwin leaves his father’s house does he realize that his hatred



had been misplaced. Away from home, he discovers "the weight of white people in the world," by which he specifically refers to his experience of Jim Crow of the pre-Civil Rights era (65). A year of "We don't serve Negroes here" breeds in Baldwin murderous rage and bitterness.

When Baldwin returns home because his father is dying, the understanding that his hatred had been misdirected allows him to see more clearly that the hatred had never been straightforward: "It was only that I *had* hated him and I wanted to hold on to this hatred. I did not want to look on him as a ruin: it was not a ruin I had hated" (75). There is indeed an odd quality to the emotion Baldwin describes. It is a willful hatred, too intense and insistent to be a mark of indifference or dismissal. It keeps sliding into something else that Baldwin refuses to name—if he *had* hated his father, what is it that he is feeling at the moment? It was not a ruin that he had hated, he says, implying that his father had been strong enough to hold his hatred. By holding his son's hatred, the father had protected the son from knowing too soon the weight of white people in this world. The tragic quality of the circulation of affect between the father and the son lies in their inability to express their concern for each other in any way other than hatred. This Baldwin realizes when he is sitting at his father's funeral and has a sudden insight into the African American parents' plight: "And when the children were hungry and sullen and distrustful and one watched them, daily, growing wilder, and further away, and running headlong into danger, it was the Lord who knew what the charged heart endured as the strap was laid to the backside; the Lord alone who knew what one *would* have said if one had had, like the Lord, the gift of the living word" (78). What the parents cannot say in words is translated into a

harsher punishment laid on the child's body. The threat of racism disrupts the relationship between them, breeding resentment and hatred in place of love, or, to be more precise, forcing them to express love through the gestures of hatred.

This lack of language with which to express their affect is a common conundrum of melancholic subjects. Freud notes that the melancholic subject may know whom it has lost but not what it has lost. The distinction is a useful one since it points to the way signification fails to access what has been lost. It can describe the fact of lack—thus victimizing the lacking subject—but it cannot reconstruct for the lacking subject the state prior to castration. At his father's funeral, Baldwin suddenly retrieves an image from the past, activated by someone singing one of his father's favorite songs. The memory is activated by song, not words: "I had forgotten, in the rage of my growing up, how proud my father had been of me when I was little. Apparently, I had had a voice and my father had liked to show me off before the members of the church. I had forgotten what he had looked like when he was pleased but now I remembered that he had always been grinning with pleasure when my solos ended" (79). The memory is one of a proud mirroring between father and son, one in which the son's talent fed into the father's pride that fed back into the son's affirmation of self. The memory poignantly captures the psychic fullness that has been lost. At the same time, the image is clearly isolated from the rest of Baldwin's affective life. Furthermore, Baldwin manages to recuperate that memory precisely because he is sitting at his father's funeral. Had his father continued to be the strong and bitter man that he had always been, the circle of negative affect would have been maintained. Much as he craves a conversation with his father, his father cannot be brought back

from the dead.

"Notes of a Native Son" concludes with the realization that there can be no pure return to the past. The past will have to be retroactively resignified:

"But as for me and my house," my father had said, "we will serve the Lord." I wondered, as we drove him to his resting place, what this line had meant for him. . . . I suspected in these familiar lines a meaning which had never been there for me before. All of my father's texts and songs, which I had decided were meaningless, were arranged before me at his death like empty bottles, waiting to hold the meaning which life would give them for me. (83)

By returning to his father's favorite lines in the Bible, he proposes a linguistic engagement with his father's favorite texts and songs. Much like Kaja Silverman's girl love, the girl's "symbolic recovery from a later moment in time" of her pre-Oedipal love for the mother, Baldwin proposes a life-long task of redemptive symbolization (161). One could say that "Notes of a Native Son" itself is the product of such redemptive symbolization. Baldwin originally published a version of this essay with the title "Me and My House" in the November 1955 issue of *Harper's* magazine, thirteen years *after* his father's death. Baldwin then revises the essay and gives it a new title while preparing for his first collection of essays. "Notes of a Native Son" itself cuts across at least three different points in time, making no pretense of giving a chronological account of the events leading up to his father's death. The past is scrutinized and re-scrutinized in this ongoing recovery of his father, from a later moment in time.

### The Ethics of Melancholia

Baldwin's redemptive symbolization had ramifications beyond his personal life. In *The Fire Next Time*, Baldwin's engagement with his father's texts and songs gains political significance in relation to the historical moment of the book's publication. *The Fire Next Time* first appeared as an article for *The New Yorker* in 1962 and hit the national readership in the book form the following year. The early years of the sixties marked a transitional period in the struggle for antiracism in the United States. The Civil-Rights Movement of the fifties had concentrated on abolishing *de jure* segregation through democratic processes of nonviolent protest, legal campaigns, and persuasion. Although the movement was to culminate in the March on Washington in 1963 and the signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, by the early sixties the limits of conceiving racial justice as civil rights were also becoming clear. Dissatisfaction with the Civil-Rights Movement was being registered in the increasing support of the creed of separatism proposed by the Nation of Islam represented by Elijah Muhammad and the charismatic Malcolm X. Although similar imaginings of black radicalism have a much longer historical trajectory, as has been persuasively argued by Nikhil Pal Singh in *Black Is a Country*, black radicalism had never received so much national attention and media coverage as in the period beginning in the early sixties. It is to this palpable and increasingly public presence of black nationalism that Baldwin responds in *The Fire Next Time*.

As Marianne DeKoven writes, Baldwin in *The Fire Next Time* moves "much closer to the ideas and emotions of the Black Power movement" than in any of his earlier writing (246). This is reflected in his

especially sympathetic rendering of what the Nation of Islam offered African Americans at the psychological level: "the speakers had an air of utter dedication, and the people looked toward them with a kind of intelligence of hope on their faces—not as though they were being consoled or drugged but as though they were being jolted" (49). The leaders of the movement argued that white people were devils who would be annihilated by God; the leaders were asking African Americans to stop begging for acceptance into the devil's country. There is little that is new in such an apocalyptic imagination, Baldwin observes, but the people who joined the movement and those who listened were responding to a sense of racial affirmation they had never received from the nation to which they supposedly belonged. "Negroes in this country," explains Baldwin, "are taught really to despise themselves from the moment their eyes open on the world. The world is white and they are black" (25). The sense of hope came from the promise of psychic reparation as much as from the prospect of constructing a black nation. In short, the Nation of Islam was proposing black narcissism by inverting white racism.

As Baldwin recounts his meeting with Elijah Muhammad, he writes of his first impression of the religious leader thus: "He made me think of my father and me as we might have been friends" (64). This is certainly an odd way of framing the meeting between two prominent public figures representing the polar opposites of the antiracist struggle of the early sixties. Yet the creed of the Nation of Islam echoes in many ways what Baldwin found the most troubling in his father's view of the world. For his father, who was also a minister although Christian rather than Muslim, the world was divided into whites and blacks. White people were not to be trusted, and the only way to relate to them was

through hatred and bitterness. “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” was his father’s proud statement of self-righteousness and condemnation of every white person, including the white teacher who took his son to see a play. Elijah Muhammad may be kindlier and more inviting, but that does not change the fact that his theology calls for retaliation based on a Manichaean racial dualism. The occasion provides Baldwin with the opportunity to simultaneously reengage with his father’s legacy and intervene in the political crisis of the times.

The bitterness, the figurative fire that was burning the nation, triggers the central question of *The Fire Next Time*: “But what was the point, the purpose, of *my* salvation if it did not permit me to behave with love toward others, no matter how they behaved toward me? What others did was their responsibility, for which they would answer when the judgment trumpet sounded. But what *I* did was *my* responsibility . . . .” (40). The final statement echoes his father’s favorite line “But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Stated in this way, however, the meaning of the line seems to have undergone a sea-change to support Baldwin’s refusal to replicate the logic of white America in the form of retaliation. What is surprising in Baldwin’s statement is the sudden reversal of affect from hatred to love that begins at the personal level. It hints at an ethical potential at the core of racial melancholia. David Eng and Shinhee Han argue in their essay “A Dialogue on Racial Melancholia” that melancholia is “one psychic process in which the loved object is so overwhelmingly important to and beloved by the ego that the ego is willing to preserve it even at the cost of its own self” (695). In other words, the melancholic subject preserves the loved object and, as a result, the possibility of love.

In contrast, narcissism begins by killing off the loved object, leaving

no space for the other. Freud himself was to confront the full violence at the heart of narcissism in the wake of World War I. The war forced Freud to puzzle over how sane and rational individuals can turn into irrational and violent groups. A group, he discovers, is “a number of individuals who have put one and the same object in the place of their ego ideal” (*Group Psychology* 61). Normative subjects who have successfully installed an ego-ideal at their culture’s behest become members of the larger social unit. What Freud had failed to take into account in his pre-war studies was the violence yielded by these larger units, a danger that is all the more intensified by “a lowering in each individual of his sense of responsibility for his own performances” (*Group Psychology* 23). In other words, from the perspective of the larger society, it might appear as if its members have successfully curbed their narcissism; however, when groups clash, violence becomes massive and infinitely excusable.

The full extent of such violence was to become manifest during World War II. In the years following the experience of fascism and genocide, Theodor Adorno revisits Freud’s interwar writings to examine the psychological base of large-scale group violence. Adorno takes Freud’s discussion a step further by pointing out that the normative subject actually experiences an enlargement of his narcissism by belonging to a group: “The narcissistic *gain* provided by fascist propaganda is obvious. It suggests continuously and sometimes in rather devious ways, that the follower, simply through belonging to the in-group, is better, higher and purer than those who are excluded” (130). Adorno emphasizes the word “gain” because for him the enlargement of narcissism in groups is not an accidental byproduct of group formation but the reward given to participating subjects. Freud’s and Adorno’s

conclusions add weight to Baldwin's critique of both white racism and black nationalism as the two faces of the same dynamics. Indeed, Baldwin references fascism in order to critique the blood revenge imagined by the Nation of Islam. "If one is permitted to treat any group of people with special disfavor because of their race or the color of their skin," argues Baldwin, "there is no limit to what one will force them to endure, and since the entire race has been mysteriously indicted, no reason not to attempt to destroy it root and branch. This is precisely what the Nazis attempted" (*Fire* 82-3). If Baldwin's comparison of the Nation of Islam and Nazism reads like a logical leap in his essay, it makes perfect sense in the light of group psychology analyzed by Freud and Adorno.

The ethical turn necessarily begins at the personal level where the possibility of love has been preserved, not so much in the dominant subjects as in the melancholic, lacking subjects. But for that turn to become socially effective, the melancholic internal dialogue between the ego and the loved object would have to be taken back to the social arena. As Anne Anlin Cheng writes in the conclusion of her work on racial melancholia, "it is the transition from ethics to politics that will prove to be our most persistent challenge and the path of our most difficult loves" (195). This, I believe, is the work that James Baldwin is engaged in through his writings that are so often directly addressed to a national readership. Baldwin gives public language to loss and opens up a space of encounter between his ego and his white and black readers. In this reversal of melancholic internal dialogue, an unexpected reversal of affect is proffered:

All of us know, whether or not we are able to admit it, that mirrors can



only lie, that death by drowning is all that awaits one there. It is for this reason that love is so desperately sought and so cunningly avoided. . . . I use the word "love" here not merely in the personal sense but as a state of being, or a state of grace—not in the infantile American sense of being made happy but in the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth. (*Fire* 95)

Inter-subjective love opens up the ego to the other by rupturing the closure of the narcissistic loop of ego and ego-ideal. Baldwin puts in words what Freud systematically avoids stating—that the lacking subject who has received a wound to narcissism has a greater potential for growth in comparison to the dominant subject whose narcissism is left intact. This love may not make us happy in the infantile sense, but it could shift the relation between self and others, making a different future a possibility.

This was a position Baldwin continued to maintain, albeit with increasing difficulty, throughout his career as a writer. It is one of the most profound differences between Freud and Baldwin. At the end of *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Freud confesses, "I have not the courage to rise up before my fellow-men as a prophet, and I bow to their reproach that I can offer them no consolation" (111). As a scientist, Freud had a deep aversion to any kind of illusion and felt incapable of projecting an optimistic future for the human civilization. In contrast, Baldwin, the more idealistic of the two, continued to speak of the necessity of the ethics of melancholia in face of the mounting racial violence that plagued the nation such as the assassinations of Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., and John F. Kennedy, the death of the Black Panthers, and the Atlanta child murders. Baldwin's continuing relevance today demands that we reexamine the state of racial relations

in the twenty-first century.

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## 【Abstract】

## The Ethics of Melancholia in James Baldwin's Essays

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This paper utilizes Sigmund Freud's theorization of the lacking subject to read James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son" and *The Fire Next Time*. In Freud's universalizing account, it is only the anatomical difference between the sexes that results in a lacking subject. Baldwin's account of the psychic dimension of racial subjection introduces race as a valid complication to Freud's theory, injecting the social back into psychoanalysis. Baldwin's texts, in turn, are illuminated by the psychoanalytic terms of melancholia and narcissism provided by Freud. "Notes of a Native Son" is a searing examination of Baldwin's problematic relationship to his father. His turning away from the black father results in the psychic economy of racial melancholia. At his father's funeral, Baldwin retrieves the memory of proud identification between himself as a small boy and his father. This then becomes the beginning of a life-long task of redemptive symbolization that retroactively revises the father-son relationship. His efforts reach a momentary resolution in his famous *The Fire Next Time* where he proposes love as an active principle for antiracist struggle. Baldwin's psychic journey is a vivid testimony to the possibility of an ethics of melancholia, the possibility of rupturing the closed loop of narcissism. The closed loop of ego and ego-ideal being the basis of group psychology and large-scale violence, the political potential of melancholia has significance beyond the healing of the individual psyche.

**Key Words**

psychoanalysis and race, melancholia, narcissism, James Baldwin